

*(Note: Monte Noelke is recuperating from major surgery, so until he mans the keyboard again, we thought we would pull some Shortgrass Country from the files.)*

July is a pretty calm month for ranchers now that the screwworm is being controlled by cobalt instead of various mixtures we used to pack around on our saddles.

There remain, however, a few tasks that make our existence a little short of Utopian at this time of year. Spending a week or so hammering around on a windmill, for example, while every old cow in the pasture is doing her best to set a new record for drinking from the already low water supply. Or merely waiting miserably for a windmill wheel to turn over so we can get a cool drink ourselves and being frustrated by an absence of wind that would make the Ancient Mariner's doldrums seems like a March gale.

A break in the normal July lassitude occurred last week when the local office in charge of handing out money for the USDA (the ASC) created a little excitement by issuing a form letter announcing that an operation named "Project Simpler" had hit the county.

At least it seemed calm until I realized that Project Simpler was not one of those deals where the government flies in a staff of men loaded down with money to battle

poverty — men with the zeal and determination of a rancher fighting a grass fire approaching his own fenceline.

But upon discovering that Project Simpler was merely an idea of Mr. Johnson and Mr. Freeman to have us ranchers write in suggestions on how to simplify ASC forms, my enthusiasm dimmed faster than that of a clutch of Kluxers facing the sad truth that their vice wizard was an undercover man for J. Edgar Hoover.

I was inclined to dash off a caustic note reminding the ASC that I not only continue to keep a picture of Barry Golddauber in a locket chained around my neck and am therefore unsympathetic to any of their causes, but I also feel that anyone with an assured monthly budget large enough to run the Grace Steamship Lines who had to ask a rancher how to run their operation must certainly "have pigs under their beds" or something worse — like being nutty.

I was tempted to ask the agency how they expected us ranchers to help with their plan when we had operated on a precarious day-to-day basis so long that we considered any action we could plan three days ahead of time as being a long-range operation; that when we could schedule our activities a week in advance we figured we'd achieved something similar to the Soviets' Five-Year Plan.

Before I could get to the typewriter, I became distracted trying to figure out where the name Project Simpler had originated. Obviously, the English gent who conceived the gimmick to end all gimmicks – A Tiger In Your Tank – hadn't come up with this one.

Then I recalled that the high tea set in Washington had taken to throwing two parties for the same guest on the very same night. It wasn't hard to imagine that some USDA chief in charge of creating names and initials for his department's projects and battles had tried to do enough soft shoeing at two different functions to convince the hosts or hostesses that he was loyal only to them, and that when he was faced next day with naming this new project, he'd been too fuzzy-headed and sorefooted to perform as usual.

By the time I had hashed and rehashed this thought and worried a while about why we never get in on some juicy government program like the Job Corps, it was time for my nap.

You know what napping does to a man in July, so it's a waste of time to explain in detail how, when I awoke, I didn't care whether the USDA ever learns my suggestions for smoothing out their money-dispensing task.

Besides, it's doubtful they'd heed my advice, especially considering how many times I've told each of the past three administrators of the local office that their program wouldn't ever fill the needs of us ranchers until they let us draw our wool and lamb incentives in advance.

So I guess Project Simpler will be launched without my help. I hope it proves to be a success, and that my fellow ranchers are given part of the credit for simplifying this all-important part of our lives. Because the Good Lord knows there is no more fertile ground for the talents of a simplifier than the field of government bureaucracy. —

(07/22/65)